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(54) METHOD FOR CALIBRATING AN ALTITUDE SENSING STEREO VISION DEVICE OF A UAV

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PROCÉDÉ D'ÉTALONNAGE D'UN DISPOSITIF DE VISION STÉRÉO DE DÉTECTION D'ALTITUDE D'UN UAV

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EP 3 992 580 B1

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Description

Technical field

[0001] The present invention relates to a method for calibrating an altitude sensing stereo vision device of an unmanned aerial vehicle. The present invention also relates to a computer program product, a computer-readable storage medium, an electrical signal, and an unmanned aerial vehicle system.

Background

[0002] Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) are known to provide a wide range of services. The often small form-factor and high manoeuvrability of modern UAVs has made them most suitable for performing e.g. delivery or transportation of items, surveillance and aerial photography. To ensure proper control and navigation of a UAV through its surroundings, a UAV comprises a flight control unit and one or more sensors for gathering position data. Sensors commonly used on UAVs for gathering position data includes GPS receivers, barometric altimeters, accelerometers, radar, LIDAR, conventional cameras, and stereo vision systems.

[0003] The UAV may rely on an autonomous flight control system for navigation and flight control, allowing the UAV to travel from e.g. a start location to a target location with minimal or no input from a human operator. Accordingly, the flight control system can use the position data gathered by the sensors to control the flight path of the UAV, e.g. circumventing obstacles (such as buildings or vegetation). Alternatively, the position data from the sensors are presented (for example wirelessly transmitted) at an operator terminal, allowing a human operator to control the UAV using e.g. a video feed and GPS data.

[0004] One of the most important position parameters to precisely obtain during operation of a UAV, regardless if the UAV is controlled autonomously, semi-autonomously or manually, is the altitude Above Ground Level (AGL) of the UAV. An accurate reading of the altitude above ground is important, at least to make sure that the UAV does not collide with the ground, or ground features such as buildings and vegetation.

[0005] Existing solutions utilize e.g. a barometric altimeter to determine the altitude of the UAV. For example in US2019170860, a barometric pressure based altimeter is used to indicate the elevation of the UAV. A drawback of determining the altitude above ground level of a UAV with a barometric altimeter is that by deriving the altitude from a measurement of the air pressure, the terrain topography and ground features will not be taken into account. A barometric altimeter operates by correlating a reference altitude (e.g. 0 m) to a reference air pressure (e.g. the pressure at sea level), wherein any deviation in the air pressure compared to the reference pressure is correlated to a deviation in altitude from the reference altitude. As a UAV flies over a hill along a path

of constant air pressure, e.g. such that the altitude Above Sea Level (ASL) is constant, the actual altitude above ground level will vary despite the fact that the altitude derived by the barometric altimeter remains constant. Accordingly, barometric altimeters perform poorly for UAVs operating over terrain topographies with height variations.

[0006] In another solution, a stereo vision device is used to determine the altitude above ground level of the UAV. The accuracy of a stereo vision device is high, and as it captures stereo images of the ground, or any ground features, it may correctly determine the altitude above terrain with varying topography. A drawback with stereo vision devices is that the maximum altitude which can be measured is limited, specifically because the separation distance between the two imaging devices of the stereo vision device. As small UAVs cannot accommodate stereo vision devices with a large separation distance, this method of measuring the altitude can only be used at low altitudes. Furthermore, any disturbance to the precise alignment of the two imaging devices may degrade the measurement accuracy of the stereo vision device.

[0007] Consequently, in existing solutions for determining the altitude above ground level for UAVs, there exists a pervasive trade-off between the size of the sensor system, the accuracy, and the operational altitude range.

WO2017206179A1 discloses a method for calibrating multiple sensors onboard a UAV, wherein the UAV can be controlled to move along a predetermined calibration path or pattern while the sensors on the UAV collect sensor data. The predetermined calibration path or pattern can include simple geometric patterns (e.g., oval). The UAV can be moved manually (e.g., by hand) or remotely by a user, or the UAV may be controlled autonomously to move along the calibration path or pattern. The collected sensor data can then be processed to calibrate the multiple sensors including different types of sensors. DE102014016342 A1 discloses a method for calibrating a squint angle (γ) of wherein at least one distance of the vehicle to an object different from the vehicle is detected by means of at least one detection device of the vehicle different from the stereo camera (10), wherein the squint angle (γ) is calibrated in dependence on the detected distance.

Summary of the invention

[0008] It is an object of the present invention to overcome at least some of the shortcomings of the previous solutions, and to provide a method allowing improved altitude sensing in a UAV.

[0009] According to a first aspect of the present invention, this and other objects are achieved by a method for calibrating an altitude sensing stereo vision device of an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV), as defined in claim 1.

[0010] That an altitude value is 'derived' from the (altitude sensing) stereo vision device may mean that the

altitude value comes directly from the stereo vision device or that the altitude value is determined from a depth data image provided by the stereo vision device.

[0011] The stereo vision device of the UAV is typically a downward stereo vision device. So in at least some examples, a derived first altitude value is the distance in the nadir direction from the UAV to a closest feature below the UAV, such as the ground or a roof of a building.

[0012] The recorded first and second altitude values could be used to form a calibration table. That is, the 'calibration data' may be a calibration table. Alternatively, the recorded first and second altitude values could be used to form a graph or function relating the recorded at least one first altitude value to the recorded at least one second altitude value.

[0013] The present invention is at least partly based on the understanding that by recording at least one first altitude value and at least one corresponding second altitude value derived and obtained from the stereo vision device and the other device, respectively, during the ascent of the UAV, wherein the at least one second altitude value here is regarded as true, a subsequently derived first altitude value from the stereo vision device can be adjusted/calibrated based on the recorded values (without having to obtain any new information from the other device after the ascent), such that the stereo vision device can provide an accurate altitude reading also at high(er) altitudes outside the normally accurate range of the stereo vision device (above). In other words, the accurate/reliable altitude range of the stereo vision device may be increased. Also, since the first and second altitude values recorded as calibration data are derived and obtained during the ascent following take off, the UAV beneficially has access to fresh/updated calibration data while flying (the rest of) the route. Furthermore, any disturbance/changes to the alignment of the two cameras of the stereo vision device during a preceding flight session may be compensated for. The present adjustment/calibration of (additional) first altitude values from the stereo vision device should not be regarded as sensor fusion.

[0014] The other device may be a barometric altimeter. From the barometric altimeter, reliable and accurate (relative) second altitude values may be obtained during the ascent, which ascent typically is vertical or at least occurs over even ground. The barometric altimeter could be reset to provide a (second) altitude value of for example zero when the UAV is on the ground before take-off.

[0015] Alternatively, the other device may comprise a barometric altimeter as well as one or more other types of sensors. In one example, the other device comprises the barometric altimeter, an accelerometer, and a Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) receiver, for example a GPS receiver, wherein each obtained second altitude value is a combination of data from the barometric altimeter, accelerometer, GNSS receiver (sensor fusion). In another example, the other device could be a GNSS receiver for Real-Time Kinematic (RTK) measurements.

[0016] The first and second altitude values may be heights above ground level (AGL). In case the route flown by the unmanned aerial vehicle passes over water, the (derived additional first) altitude value could at times be height above mean sea level (AMSL).

[0017] A first altitude value of the at least one first altitude value and a corresponding second altitude value of the at least one corresponding second altitude value may be derived and obtained, respectively, at substantially the same altitude of the unmanned aerial vehicle as determined by one of the altitude sensing stereo vision device and the other device, preferably as determined by the other device. For example, a first altitude value (e.g. 18.5 m) and a second corresponding altitude value (e.g. 20.0 m) may be derived and obtained, respectively, when the unmanned aerial vehicle is at the altitude 20.0 m as determined by the other device. 'Substantially' may here be construed as +/- 10 cm, but could be significantly higher (e.g. +/- 50 cm) if only lower accuracy is required.

[0018] A first altitude value of the at least one first altitude value and a corresponding second altitude value of the at least one corresponding second altitude value may be derived and obtained, respectively, at substantially the same time (in other words, substantially simultaneously). 'Substantially' may here be construed as +/- 0.1 sec, but could be significantly longer (e.g. +/- 0.5 sec) if only lower accuracy is required. Since the ascent of the UAV typically is continuous (i.e. the UAV usually does not stop and hover during the ascent and then continue the ascent), each first altitude value and each corresponding second altitude value are typically derived/obtained at substantially the same time and altitude.

[0019] A plurality of first altitude values may be derived and a plurality of corresponding second altitude values may be obtained during the ascent of the unmanned aerial vehicle and recorded as calibration data. This allows different (additional) first altitude values derived from the stereo vision device while the UAV flies the route to be properly adjusted/calibrated. The plurality of first altitude values and corresponding second altitude values could for example be: (17.0 m, 18.0 m), (18.5 m, 20.0 m), (19.0m, 22.0 m), etc. Deriving/obtaining (and recoding) only one first altitude value and only one corresponding second altitude value may be enough if only a single altitude needs to be accurately determined by the stereo vision device, for example a predetermined altitude above a ground delivery location.

[0020] The second altitude value corresponding to the derived additional first altitude value may be determined by interpolation between recorded first and second altitude values. This may improve the adjustment/calibration of additional first altitude values derived from the stereo vision device while the UAV flies the route. The interpolation may be linear or piecewise constant or be of a more complex type, such as polynomial interpolation or spline interpolation. The corresponding second altitude value may be determined by interpolation by using at least the two closest pairs of first and second altitude values in the

calibration data. Linear interpolation may be graphically represented by a graph, wherein a straight line could be drawn between (each) two subsequent pairs of recorded first and second altitude values, from which straight line new first and second altitude values could be constructed. For example, if two pairs of altitude values such as (17.0 m, 18.0m) and (18.5 m, 20.0 m) are recorded, a new pair of altitude values may be constructed in between the recorded values with linear interpolation, resulting in a new altitude value pair of e.g. (17.75 m, 19.0 m).

[0021] New (first and) second altitude values could also be constructed outside the recorded altitude range by extrapolation, for example by using at least two pairs of altitude values being the lowest or highest values with respect to one of the first and second values.

[0022] The first altitude values may be derived at different increasing (predetermined) altitudes during at least a portion, with respect to altitude, of the ascent of the unmanned aerial vehicle, wherein the corresponding second altitude values are obtained at substantially the same (predetermined) altitudes. In this way, sufficient first and second altitude values may be recorded to later properly adjust/calibrate a derived additional first altitude value, without making the present method too "heavy" processing- and/or data storage-wise. The first and second altitude values may for example be recorded every x meter during at least a portion of the ascent, wherein x may be in the range of 1-5 m, such as 2 or 3 meters. Hence, the first and second altitude values could for example be recorded at 18.0 m, 20.0 m, 22.0 m, etc., as determined for example by the other device.

[0023] The steps of determining a second altitude value corresponding to the derived first additional altitude value based on the recorded calibration data; and adjusting the derived additional first altitude value based on the determined second altitude value may be performed only if the derived additional first altitude value exceeds a (predetermined) threshold value. In this way, it may not be necessary to perform the adjustment/calibration of a derived additional first altitude value at lower altitudes where the additional first altitude value derived from the stereo vision device is expected to be accurate. The threshold value may for example be predetermined based on a designated range of the stereo vision device. The threshold value may for example be in the range of 5-15 meters, such as 10 meters.

[0024] Likewise, some or all of the recorded first and second altitude values should be derived/obtained above a threshold altitude value, which (also) may be predetermined based on the designated range of the stereo vision device. The predetermined threshold altitude value may for example be in the range of 5-15 meters, such as 10 meters.

[0025] The unmanned aerial vehicle may further be arranged to ascend in a (substantially) straight and vertical trajectory. This may ensure that the calibration data become correct and useful. If the unmanned aerial vehicle takes off from and ascends above a level ground, it could

ascend in a (slightly) off-vertical trajectory.

[0026] The unmanned aerial vehicle may be controlled (e.g. flown) (autonomously or by remote control by a person) based the adjusted first altitude value.

5 **[0027]** The method may for example further comprise using the adjusted additional first altitude value to arrange the unmanned aerial vehicle to hover at a predetermined altitude above a ground delivery location along the route; and arranging the unmanned aerial vehicle to deliver an object to the ground delivery location by winching the object down to the ground delivery location using a winch device of the unmanned aerial vehicle while hovering at the predetermined altitude above the ground delivery location. By accurately knowing that the UAV is at
10 the predetermined altitude, winching down the object can be performed very fast and safe. The predetermined altitude above the ground delivery location could be in the range of 5-50 meters, such as 30.0 m. In other parts of the route, the UAV could fly different (typically higher) altitudes above ground level or above mean sea level. The object could be a defibrillator, a parcel, etc.

15 **[0028]** The steps of: arranging the unmanned aerial vehicle to take off from ground and ascend; deriving at least one first altitude value from the stereo vision device and obtaining at least one corresponding second altitude value from another device of the unmanned aerial vehicle during the ascent of the unmanned aerial vehicle; and recording the derived at least one first altitude value and the obtained at least one corresponding second altitude value as calibration data may be repeated for each flight
20 session of the unmanned aerial vehicle. A 'flight session' may include the take-off, the ascent, flying (the rest of) the route, and a landing. By repeating the above mentioned steps, the UAV beneficially has fresh/updated calibration data every time it flies.

25 **[0029]** The stereo vision device may comprise a first camera and a second camera, wherein the distance between the first camera and the second camera may be in the range of 4 to 15 cm. These distances are suitable considering the typical overall size of an unmanned aerial vehicle, but limit the designated range of the stereo vision device, whereby the present adjustment/calibration of first altitude values derived from the stereo vision device becomes extra useful.

30 **[0030]** According to a second aspect of the invention, there is provided a computer program product as defined in claim 13.

35 **[0031]** This aspect may exhibit the same or similar features and technical effects as the first aspect, and vice versa. The computer could be a control unit of the unmanned aerial vehicle.

40 **[0032]** According to a third aspect of the present invention, there is provided a computer-readable storage medium comprising the computer program product according to the second aspect.

45 **[0033]** According to a fourth aspect of the present invention, there is provided an electrical signal embodied on a carrier wave and propagated on an electrical medi-

um, the electrical signal comprising the computer program product according to the second aspect.

[0034] According to a fifth aspect of the present invention, there is provided an unmanned aerial vehicle system, as defined in claim 16.

[0035] This aspect may exhibit the same or similar features and technical effects as any of the previous aspects, and vice versa. The control unit may be included in the unmanned aerial vehicle or be separate and/or remote from the unmanned aerial vehicle. The control unit may be a flight control unit (FCU).

[0036] These and other aspects, features, and implementations can be expressed as methods, apparatus, systems, components, program products, means or steps for performing a function, and in other ways. Further advantages and advantageous features of the invention are disclosed in the following description and drawings.

Brief description of the drawings

[0037] These and other aspects of the present invention will now be described in more detail, with reference to the appended drawings showing a currently preferred embodiment of the invention.

Figure 1 is a schematic drawing of an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) according to one or more embodiments of the present invention.

Figure 2 depicts a flow chart illustrating a method in accordance to one or more embodiments of the present invention.

Figure 3a illustrates an unmanned aerial vehicle taking off and ascending in accordance with embodiments of the present invention.

Figure 3b illustrates an unmanned aerial vehicle flying a route in accordance with embodiments of the present invention.

Figure 3c illustrates an unmanned aerial vehicle arranged to deliver an object to a ground delivery location while hovering at a predetermined altitude above the ground delivery location in accordance with embodiments of the present invention.

Figures 4a-c depict calibration data.

Detailed description

[0038] With reference to Fig. 1 there is illustrated an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) 100. The UAV 100 may be at least partly autonomous. The UAV could also be referred to as a drone.

[0039] The UAV 100 may comprise a propulsion unit 110. The propulsion unit 110 comprises one or more propulsion devices enabling the UAV 100 to e.g. take-off and land, stay airborne, hover, and fly along an aerial route. The one or more propulsion devices could be a plurality of arms each provided with a(n electric) motor connected to a propeller.

[0040] The UAV 100 may also comprise a winch device

112. The winch device 112 allows the UAV 100 to deliver an object to a ground delivery location by winching the object down to the ground delivery location using the winch device 100 while hovering above the ground delivery location. The winch device 112 may for example comprise a reel, a tether windable on the reel, and a motor for rotating the reel.

[0041] The UAV 100 may also comprise a battery pack for powering (among other things) the motors of the propulsion unit 110 and the motor of the winch device 112.

[0042] The UAV 100 may also comprise a pair of landing skids.

[0043] The UAV 100 further comprises an altitude sensing stereo vision device 122 and another altitude sensing device 123. The stereo vision device 122 is a downward stereo vision device. In other words, the stereo vision device 122 may be directed straight downwards ("look" straight down) at zero pitch and zero roll of the UAV 100. The stereo vision device 122 may comprise a first camera and a second camera. The distance between the first camera and the second camera may be in the range of 4 to 15 cm. The stereo vision device 122 may for example be an Intel RealSense Depth Camera D435. The another altitude sensing device 123 may for example be a barometric altimeter.

[0044] The UAV 100 further comprises a control unit 121. The control unit 121 may be connected to one or more of the propulsion unit 110, the winch device 112, the stereo vision device 122, and the other device 123. The control unit 121 may be configured to perform various specific steps or actions detailed in the following by hardware or software (computer program product) 124 or a combination thereof. Any software 124 may run or be executed on the control unit 121 using a processor and a memory of the computer device control unit 121.

[0045] Fig. 2 depicts a flow chart illustrating a method for calibrating the stereo vision device 122 of the UAV 110 according to embodiments of the present invention.

[0046] With further reference to Fig. 3a, at S1 the UAV 100 is arranged to (autonomously) take off from ground G and ascend. This may be performed by the control unit 121 instructing the propulsion unit 110 accordingly. The UAV 100 may ascend in a substantially straight and vertical trajectory 1, as illustrated in fig. 3a. The ascent 1 of the UAV 100 is preferably continuous and/or monotonic. 'Monotonic' here means that the altitude of the UAV 100 never decreases during the ascent 1. The ascent 1 may be part of a route that the UAV 100 flies.

[0047] At S2, at least one first altitude value is derived from the stereo vision device 122 and at least one corresponding second altitude value is obtained from the another device (barometric altimeter) 123 during the ascent 1 of the UAV 100.

[0048] 'Deriving' a first altitude value from the stereo vision device 122 may imply that the altitude value comes directly from the stereo vision device 122 or that the altitude value is determined from a depth data image provided by the stereo vision device 122. The depth data

image may comprise a plurality of point values indicative of the measured depth for each point in the depth data image (i.e. the distance from objects within the field of view of the depth data image to the stereo vision device 122), and the first altitude value may for example be derived by averaging the depth point values over at least a portion of the depth data image.

[0049] Furthermore, it is appreciated that the altitude values here are heights above ground (level) G.

[0050] At S3, the derived first altitude value(s) and obtained second altitude value(s) are recorded as calibration data, e.g. onto a storage medium of the control unit 121.

[0051] Exemplary calibration data are shown in figures 4a-b. In Fig. 4a, recorded first altitude values 10a-15a and corresponding recorded second altitude values 10b-15b are used to form a calibration table. The first altitude values 10a-15a are in the left column, and the second altitude values 10b-15b are in the right column. In Fig. 4b, recorded first altitude values 10a-15a and corresponding recorded second altitude values 10b-15b are plotted in a chart as pairs/data points. The horizontal axis is altitude determined by the stereo vision device 122, and the vertical axis is altitude determined by the other device 123.

[0052] First altitude value 10a and second altitude value 10b (on the same row in the calibration table of Fig. 4a) correspond in that they are derived/obtained at substantially the same altitude of the UAV 100, preferably as determined by the other device 123. The same altitude for the values 10a and 10b is 12.0m. Since the ascent 1 of the UAV 10 typically is continuous, the values 10a and 10b may be derived/obtained at substantially the same time, i.e. simultaneously. Likewise, second altitude value 11b corresponds to first altitude value 11a (both obtained/derived at 14.0 m as determined by the other device 123), and so on.

[0053] The first altitude values 10a-15a may be derived at different increasing predetermined discrete altitudes 10c-15c (see e.g. Fig. 3a) during at least a portion - with respect to altitude - of the ascent 1 of the UAV 100, wherein the corresponding second altitude values 10b-15b are obtained at substantially the same altitudes 10c-15c. In the exemplary calibration data of figures 4a-b, the first and second altitude values 10a-15a and 10b-15b are derived/obtained and recorded every 2 meters during a portion of the ascent, namely at 12.0 m (altitude 10c), 14.0 m (11c), 16.0 m (12c), 18.0 m (13c), 20.0 m (14c), and 22.0 m (15c), as determined by the other device 123.

[0054] Furthermore, all of the recorded first and second altitude values 10a-15a and 10b-15b may be derived/obtained above a threshold altitude value 20', for example 10 meters. The threshold altitude value 20' may be predetermined based on a conventional designated range (or rated maximum altitude up to which derived altitude values conventionally are considered accurate/reliable) of the stereo vision device 122. Alternatively, the threshold altitude value 20' could be dynamically set as the

difference between a first altitude value and a corresponding second altitude value exceeds a predetermined value.

[0055] As an upper limit, first altitude values and corresponding second altitudes values may be recorded for as long as first altitude values can be derived from the stereo vision device 122 during the ascent 1 of the UAV 100. In practical applications, this upper limit could be in the range of 30-100 m.

[0056] Returning to Fig. 2, at S4, an additional ("en route") first altitude value is derived from the stereo vision device 122 while the UAV 100 flies a route, typically a forward flight portion 2 of the route following the ascent 1, see Fig. 3b. This additional first altitude value may for example be derived at a position 3 along the forward flight portion 2 of the route. The route (including ascent 1 and forward flight portion 2) that the UAV 100 flies may for example be less than 100 km or less than 20 km and/or has a duration less than 100 min or less than 20 min.

[0057] At S5, a second altitude value (for calibration) corresponding to the additional first altitude value derived in S4 is determined based on the recorded calibration data.

[0058] If the additional first altitude value derived in S4 matches a recorded first altitude value of the calibration data, the second altitude value determined in S5 is the recorded second altitude value of the calibration data that corresponds to said recorded first altitude value of the calibration data. For example, the additional first altitude value derived in S4 is 17.0 m matching recorded first altitude value 13a in Fig. 4a, whereby the second altitude value determined in S5 is 18.0 m (= second altitude value 13b).

[0059] In another example, if the additional first altitude value derived in S4 is say 15.0 m, (linear) interpolation as shown in Fig. 4c between recorded first altitude and second altitudes values 11a, 11b and 12a, 12b yields a corresponding second altitude value of 15.4 m determined in S5. It is hence appreciated that new altitude values may be constructed on an 'ad-hoc' or 'as-needed' basis while the UAV 100 flies the forward flight portion 2 of the route.

[0060] At S6, the additional first altitude value derived in S4 is adjusted based on the second altitude value determined in S5. This may for example be achieved by replacing the additional first altitude value derived in S4 with the second altitude value determined in S5, or by adding the difference between the second altitude value determined in S5 and the additional first altitude value derived in S4 to the first altitude value derived in S4. If for example the additional first altitude value derived in S4 at position 3 is 17.0 m, it is in S6 replaced by the more accurate second altitude value 18.0 m determined in S5, as illustrated in Fig. 4a. Or $(18.0 - 17.0) + 17.0 = 18.0$ m. Hence, the UAV 100 may accurately determine that its height above ground level 4 at position 3 is 18.0 m using the stereo vision device 122, even if this height above ground level is above the (conventional) designated

range of the stereo vision device 122.

[0061] At S7, the UAV 100 may be controlled/flown based the adjusted additional first altitude value.

[0062] The UAV 100 may for example use the adjusted additional first altitude value to determine that it maintains a minimum height above ground level.

[0063] In a specific application illustrated in Fig. 3c, the adjusted additional first value from S6 may be used to accurately arrange the UAV 100 to hover a predetermined altitude (height above ground level 5) above a ground delivery location 6. This predetermined altitude is typically higher than threshold 20'. Furthermore, the UAV 100 typically hovers at the predetermined altitude 5 above the ground delivery location 6 following a decent 7 from a higher cruising altitude of the forward flight portion 2 of the route.

[0064] The UAV 100 then delivers an object 130 to the ground delivery location 6 by winching the object 130 down to the ground delivery location 6 using the winch device 112 while hovering at the predetermined altitude 5 above the ground delivery position 6.

[0065] Returning to fig. 2, it should be noted that steps S4-S6 (and S7) could be repeated to accurately determine the height above ground level of the UAV 100 using the stereo vision device 122 (even above 20') at different positions along the route. Steps S4-S6 (and S7) may be repeated continuously.

[0066] It should also be noted that steps S5 and S6 (and S7) may be performed (only) if the derived first altitude value in S4 exceeds a threshold value, which may be the same as the threshold altitude value 20'. Below that threshold value, the altitude value derived from the stereo vision device 122 is assumed to be accurate even without the present calibration (and steps S5 and S6 may therefore be omitted).

[0067] Furthermore, the method may further comprise the optional step S8 of landing the UAV 100, ending a flight session. As further illustrated in Fig. 2, the steps S1-S6 (and S7 and/or S8) may be repeated for each flight session of the UAV 100. This way, the UAV 100 will have fresh/updated calibration data for each flight session.

[0068] The person skilled in the art realizes that the present invention by no means is limited to the embodiments described above. On the contrary, many modifications and variations are possible within the scope of the appended claims.

[0069] For example, new first altitude values 13a' and corresponding second altitude values 13b' could be constructed between the recorded first and second altitude values by interpolation (even) before S4/S5. These new first and second altitude values (e.g. 17.75 m, 19.0 m), as well as other such values, may be added to the existing calibration data. They could for example be added (as a new row) to the calibration table of Fig. 4a.

Claims

1. A method for calibrating an altitude sensing stereo vision device (122) of an unmanned aerial vehicle (100), wherein the method comprises:

arranging the unmanned aerial vehicle to take off from ground (G) and ascend;
 deriving at least one first altitude value (10a-15a) from the stereo vision device and obtaining at least one corresponding second altitude value (10b-15b) from another device (123) of the unmanned aerial vehicle during the ascent (1) of the unmanned aerial vehicle;
 recording the derived at least one first altitude value and the obtained at least one corresponding second altitude value as calibration data;
 deriving an additional first altitude value from the stereo vision device while the unmanned aerial vehicle flies a route; and
 adjusting the derived additional first altitude value based on the recorded calibration data without having to obtain any new information from the other device after the ascent.

2. The method according to claim 1, wherein the other device is a barometric altimeter or comprises a barometric altimeter.
3. The method according to claim 1 or 2, wherein said first and second altitude values are heights above ground level.
4. The method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein a first altitude value of said at least one first altitude value and a corresponding second altitude value of said at least one corresponding second altitude value are derived and obtained, respectively, at substantially the same altitude of the unmanned aerial vehicle as determined by one of the stereo vision device and the other device.
5. The method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein a first altitude value of said at least one first altitude value and a corresponding second altitude value of said at least one corresponding second altitude value are derived and obtained, respectively, at substantially the same time.
6. The method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein a plurality of first altitude values are derived and a plurality of corresponding second altitude values are obtained during the ascent of the unmanned aerial vehicle and recorded as calibration data.
7. A method according to claim 6, wherein a second altitude value corresponding to the derived addition-

al first altitude value is determined by interpolation between recorded first and second altitude values.

8. The method according to claim 6 or 7, wherein the first altitude values are derived at different increasing altitudes (10c-15c) during at least a portion, with respect to altitude, of the ascent of the unmanned aerial vehicle, and wherein the corresponding second altitude values are obtained at substantially the same altitudes. 5
9. The method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the step of: adjusting (S6) the derived additional first altitude value based on the recorded calibration data is performed only if the derived additional first altitude value exceeds a threshold value. 10
10. The method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the unmanned aerial vehicle is arranged to ascend in a substantially straight and vertical trajectory. 15
11. The method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the method further comprises: 25
- using the adjusted additional first altitude value to arrange the unmanned aerial vehicle to hover at a predetermined altitude (5) above a ground delivery location (6) along said route; and 30
- arranging the unmanned aerial vehicle to deliver an object (130) to the ground delivery location by winching the object down to the ground delivery location using a winch device (112) of the unmanned aerial vehicle while hovering at the predetermined altitude above the ground delivery location. 35
12. The method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the steps of: arranging the unmanned aerial vehicle to take off from ground and ascend; deriving at least one first altitude value from the stereo vision device and obtaining at least one corresponding second altitude value from another device of the unmanned aerial vehicle during the ascent of the unmanned aerial vehicle; and recording the derived at least one first altitude value and the obtained at least one corresponding second altitude value as calibration data are repeated for each flight session of the unmanned aerial vehicle. 40
13. A computer program product (124) comprising computer program code to perform, when executed on a computer (121) of an unmanned aerial vehicle (100), the steps of: 45
- arranging the unmanned aerial vehicle to take off from ground (G) and ascend; 50
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deriving at least one first altitude value (10a-15a) from an altitude sensing stereo vision device (122) of the unmanned aerial vehicle and obtaining at least one second altitude value (10b-15b) from another device (123) of the unmanned aerial vehicle during the ascent (1) of the unmanned aerial vehicle;

recording the derived at least one first altitude value and the obtained at least one corresponding second altitude value as calibration data; deriving an additional first altitude value from the stereo vision device while the unmanned aerial vehicle flies a route; and adjusting the derived additional first altitude value based on the recorded calibration data without having to obtain any new information from the other device after the ascent.

14. A computer-readable storage medium comprising the computer program product according to claim 13. 20
15. An electrical signal embodied on a carrier wave and propagated on an electrical medium, the electrical signal comprising the computer program product according to claim 13. 25
16. An unmanned aerial vehicle system, comprising: 30
- an unmanned aerial vehicle (100) comprising an altitude sensing stereo vision device (122) and another device (123); and
- a control unit (121) configured to: 35

- derive at least one first altitude value (10a-15a) from the stereo vision device and obtain at least one corresponding second altitude value (10b-15b) from the other device during an ascent (1) of the unmanned aerial vehicle after take-off from ground (G);
- record the derived at least one first altitude value and the obtained at least one corresponding second altitude value as calibration data, wherein the obtained at least one corresponding second altitude value is regarded as a true value;
- derive an additional first altitude value from the stereo vision device while the unmanned aerial vehicle flies a route; and
- adjust the derived additional first altitude value based on the recorded calibration data without having to obtain any new information from the other device after the ascent. 40

Patentansprüche

1. Verfahren zum Kalibrieren einer höhenmessenden

Stereobetrachtungsvorrichtung (122) eines unbemannten Luftfahrzeugs (100), wobei das Verfahren Folgendes umfasst:

- Einrichten des unbemannten Luftfahrzeugs, um vom Boden (G) abzuheben und aufzusteigen; Ableiten mindestens eines ersten Höhenwerts (10a bis 15a) aus der Stereobetrachtungsvorrichtung und Ermitteln mindestens eines entsprechenden zweiten Höhenwerts (10b bis 15b) aus einer anderen Vorrichtung (123) des unbemannten Luftfahrzeugs während des Aufstiegs (1) des unbemannten Luftfahrzeugs; Aufzeichnen des abgeleiteten mindestens einen ersten Höhenwerts und des ermittelten mindestens einen entsprechenden zweiten Höhenwerts als Kalibrierungsdaten; Ableiten eines zusätzlichen ersten Höhenwerts aus der Stereobetrachtungsvorrichtung, während das unbemannte Luftfahrzeug eine Strecke fliegt; und Einstellen des abgeleiteten zusätzlichen ersten Höhenwerts auf der Grundlage der aufgezeichneten Kalibrierungsdaten, ohne nach dem Aufstieg irgendwelche neuen Informationen aus der anderen Vorrichtung ermitteln zu müssen.
2. Verfahren nach Anspruch 1, wobei die andere Vorrichtung ein barometrischer Höhenmesser ist oder einen barometrischen Höhenmesser umfasst.
3. Verfahren nach Anspruch 1 oder 2, wobei der erste und der zweite Höhenwert Höhen oberhalb des Bodenniveaus sind.
4. Verfahren nach einem der vorhergehenden Ansprüche, wobei ein erster Höhenwert des mindestens einen ersten Höhenwerts und ein entsprechender zweiter Höhenwert des mindestens einen entsprechenden zweiten Höhenwerts bei der im Wesentlichen gleichen Höhe des unbemannten Luftfahrzeugs abgeleitet bzw. ermittelt werden, wenn sie durch entweder die Stereobetrachtungsvorrichtung oder die andere Vorrichtung bestimmt werden.
5. Verfahren nach einem der vorhergehenden Ansprüche, wobei ein erster Höhenwert des mindestens einen ersten Höhenwerts und ein entsprechender zweiter Höhenwert des mindestens einen entsprechenden zweiten Höhenwerts im Wesentlichen gleichzeitig abgeleitet bzw. ermittelt werden.
6. Verfahren nach einem der vorhergehenden Ansprüche, wobei mehrere erste Höhenwerte abgeleitet werden und mehrere entsprechende zweite Höhenwerte während des Aufstiegs des unbemannten Luftfahrzeugs ermittelt werden und als Kalibrierungsdaten aufgezeichnet werden.

7. Verfahren nach Anspruch 6, wobei ein zweiter Höhenwert entsprechend dem abgeleiteten zusätzlichen ersten Höhenwert durch Interpolation zwischen aufgezeichneten ersten und zweiten Höhenwerten bestimmt wird.

8. Verfahren nach Anspruch 6 oder 7, wobei die ersten Höhenwerte bei verschiedenen ansteigenden Höhen (10c bis 15c) während mindestens eines Abschnitts, in Bezug auf Höhe, des Aufstiegs des unbemannten Luftfahrzeugs abgeleitet werden und wobei die entsprechenden zweiten Höhenwerte bei im Wesentlichen den gleichen Höhen ermittelt werden.

9. Verfahren nach einem der vorhergehenden Ansprüche, wobei der Schritt des Einstellens (S6) des abgeleiteten zusätzlichen ersten Höhenwerts auf der Grundlage der aufgezeichneten Kalibrierungsdaten nur durchgeführt wird, wenn der abgeleitete zusätzliche erste Höhenwert einen Schwellenwert überschreitet.

10. Verfahren nach einem der vorhergehenden Ansprüche, wobei das unbemannte Luftfahrzeug eingerichtet ist, um auf einer im Wesentlichen geraden und vertikalen Trajektorie aufzusteigen.

11. Verfahren nach einem der vorhergehenden Ansprüche, wobei das Verfahren weiterhin Folgendes umfasst:

Verwenden des eingestellten zusätzlichen ersten Höhenwerts, um das unbemannte Luftfahrzeug einzurichten, um über einem Lieferort am Boden (6) entlang der Strecke auf einer vorbestimmten Höhe (5) zu schweben; und Einrichten des unbemannten Luftfahrzeugs, um ein Objekt (130) an den Lieferort am Boden zu liefern, indem das Objekt unter Verwendung einer Windenvorrichtung (112) des unbemannten Luftfahrzeugs zu dem Lieferort am Boden herabgelassen wird, während es über dem Lieferort am Boden auf der vorbestimmten Höhe schwebt.

12. Verfahren nach einem der vorhergehenden Ansprüche, wobei die Schritte des Einrichtens des unbemannten Luftfahrzeugs, um vom Boden abzuheben und aufzusteigen; des Ableitens mindestens eines ersten Höhenwerts aus der Stereobetrachtungsvorrichtung und des Ermittlens mindestens eines entsprechenden zweiten Höhenwerts aus einer anderen Vorrichtung des unbemannten Luftfahrzeugs während des Aufstiegs des unbemannten Luftfahrzeugs; und des Aufzeichnens des abgeleiteten mindestens einen ersten Höhenwerts und des ermittelten mindestens einen entsprechenden zweiten Höhenwerts

henwerts als Kalibrierungsdaten für jede Flugsession des unbemannten Luftfahrzeugs wiederholt werden.

13. Computerprogrammprodukt (124), Computerprogrammcode umfassend, um, wenn er auf einem Computer (121) eines unbemannten Luftfahrzeugs (100) ausgeführt wird, die folgenden Schritte durchzuführen:

Einrichten des unbemannten Luftfahrzeugs, um vom Boden (G) abzuheben und aufzusteigen; Ableiten mindestens eines ersten Höhenwerts (10a bis 15a) aus einer höhenmessenden Stereobetrachtungsvorrichtung (122) des unbemannten Luftfahrzeugs und Ermitteln mindestens eines zweiten Höhenwerts (10b bis 15b) aus einer anderen Vorrichtung (123) des unbemannten Luftfahrzeugs während des Aufstiegs (1) des unbemannten Luftfahrzeugs; Aufzeichnen des abgeleiteten mindestens einen ersten Höhenwerts und des ermittelten mindestens einen entsprechenden zweiten Höhenwerts als Kalibrierungsdaten; Ableiten eines zusätzlichen ersten Höhenwerts aus der Stereobetrachtungsvorrichtung, während das unbemannte Luftfahrzeug eine Strecke fliegt; und Einstellen des abgeleiteten zusätzlichen ersten Höhenwerts auf der Grundlage der aufgezeichneten Kalibrierungsdaten, ohne nach dem Aufstieg irgendwelche neuen Informationen aus der anderen Vorrichtung ermitteln zu müssen.

14. Computerlesbares Speichermedium, das Computerprogrammprodukt nach Anspruch 13 umfassend.

15. Elektrisches Signal, welches auf einer Trägerwelle ausgeführt ist und sich auf einem elektrischen Medium fortpflanzt, wobei das elektrische Signal das Computerprogrammprodukt nach Anspruch 13 umfasst.

16. Unbemanntes Luftfahrzeugsystem, Folgendes umfassend:

ein unbemanntes Luftfahrzeug (100), eine höhenmessende Stereobetrachtungsvorrichtung (122) und eine andere Vorrichtung (123) umfassend; und eine Steuereinheit (121), welche eingerichtet ist, um:

- mindestens einen ersten Höhenwert (10a bis 15a) aus der Stereobetrachtungsvorrichtung abzuleiten und mindestens einen entsprechenden zweiten Höhenwert (10b bis 15b) aus der anderen Vorrichtung wäh-

rend eines Aufstiegs (1) des unbemannten Luftfahrzeugs nach Abheben vom Boden (G) zu ermitteln;

- den abgeleiteten mindestens einen ersten Höhenwert und den ermittelten mindestens einen entsprechenden zweiten Höhenwert als Kalibrierungsdaten aufzuzeichnen, wobei der ermittelte mindestens eine entsprechende zweite Höhenwert als ein wahrer Wert angesehen wird;

- einen zusätzlichen ersten Höhenwert aus der Stereobetrachtungsvorrichtung abzuleiten, während das unbemannte Luftfahrzeug eine Strecke fliegt; und

- den abgeleiteten zusätzlichen ersten Höhenwert auf der Grundlage der aufgezeichneten Kalibrierungsdaten einzustellen, ohne nach dem Aufstieg irgendwelche neuen Informationen aus der anderen Vorrichtung ermitteln zu müssen.

Revendications

1. Procédé d'étalonnage d'un dispositif de stéréovision à détection d'altitude (122) d'un véhicule aérien sans pilote (100), dans lequel le procédé comprend de :

agencer le véhicule aérien sans pilote pour décoller du sol (G) et monter;

déduire au moins une première valeur d'altitude (10a-15a) du dispositif de stéréovision et obtenir au moins une deuxième valeur d'altitude correspondante (10b-15b) d'un autre dispositif (123) du véhicule aérien sans pilote pendant l'ascension (1) du véhicule aérien sans pilote;

enregistrer la au moins une première valeur d'altitude déduite et la au moins une deuxième valeur d'altitude correspondante obtenue en tant que données d'étalonnage en déduisant une première valeur d'altitude supplémentaire à partir du dispositif de stéréovision pendant que le véhicule aérien sans pilote parcourt un itinéraire; et

ajuster la première valeur d'altitude supplémentaire déduite sur la base des données d'étalonnage enregistrées sans avoir à obtenir de nouvelles informations de l'autre dispositif après l'ascension.

2. Procédé selon la revendication 1, dans lequel l'autre dispositif est un altimètre barométrique ou comporte un altimètre barométrique.

3. Procédé selon la revendication 1 ou 2, dans lequel lesdites première et seconde valeurs d'altitude sont des hauteurs au-dessus du niveau du sol.

4. Procédé selon une quelconque des revendications précédentes, dans lequel une première valeur d'altitude de ladite au moins une première valeur d'altitude et une deuxième valeur d'altitude correspondante de ladite au moins une deuxième valeur d'altitude correspondante sont déduites et obtenues, respectivement, à sensiblement la même altitude du véhicule aérien sans pilote telle que déterminée par un parmi le dispositif de stéréovision et l'autre dispositif.
- 5.
5. Procédé selon une quelconque des revendications précédentes, dans lequel une première valeur d'altitude de ladite au moins une première valeur d'altitude et une deuxième valeur d'altitude correspondante de ladite au moins une deuxième valeur d'altitude correspondante sont déduites et obtenues, respectivement, sensiblement en même temps.
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6. Procédé selon une quelconque des revendications précédentes, dans lequel une pluralité de premières valeurs d'altitude sont déduites et une pluralité de deuxièmes valeurs d'altitude correspondantes sont obtenues pendant l'ascension du véhicule aérien sans pilote et enregistrées en tant que données d'étalonnage.
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7. Procédé selon la revendication 6, dans lequel une deuxième valeur d'altitude correspondant à la première valeur d'altitude supplémentaire déduite est déterminée par interpolation entre des première et deuxième valeurs d'altitude enregistrées.
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8. Procédé selon la revendication 6 ou 7, dans lequel les premières valeurs d'altitude sont déduites à différentes altitudes croissantes (10c-15c) pendant au moins une partie, par rapport à l'altitude, de l'ascension du véhicule aérien sans pilote, et dans lequel les deuxièmes valeurs d'altitude correspondantes sont obtenues à sensiblement les mêmes altitudes.
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9. Procédé selon une quelconque des revendications précédentes, dans lequel l'étape consistant à : ajuster (S6) la première valeur d'altitude supplémentaire déduite sur la base des données d'étalonnage enregistrées n'est effectuée que si la première valeur d'altitude supplémentaire déduite dépasse une valeur seuil.
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10. Procédé selon une quelconque des revendications précédentes, dans lequel le véhicule aérien sans pilote est agencé pour monter selon une trajectoire sensiblement rectiligne et verticale.
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11. Procédé selon une quelconque des revendications précédentes, dans lequel le procédé comprend en outre :
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- l'utilisation de la première valeur d'altitude supplémentaire ajustée pour faire en sorte que le véhicule aérien sans pilote plane à une altitude prédéterminée (5) au-dessus d'un lieu de livraison au sol (6) le long dudit itinéraire ; et agencer le véhicule aérien sans pilote pour livrer un objet (130) à l'emplacement de livraison au sol en treuillant l'objet jusqu'à l'emplacement de livraison au sol à l'aide d'un dispositif de treuil (112) du véhicule aérien sans pilote pendant le vol stationnaire à l'altitude prédéterminée au-dessus du lieu de livraison au sol.
12. Procédé selon une quelconque des revendications précédentes, dans lequel les étapes consistant à : agencer le véhicule aérien sans pilote pour qu'il décolle du sol et monte ; déduire au moins une première valeur d'altitude du dispositif de stéréovision et obtenir au moins une deuxième valeur d'altitude correspondante d'un autre dispositif du véhicule aérien sans pilote lors de l'ascension du véhicule aérien sans pilote ; et enregistrer la au moins une première valeur d'altitude déduite et la au moins une deuxième valeur d'altitude correspondante obtenue lorsque les données d'étalonnage sont répétées pour chaque session de vol du véhicule aérien sans pilote.
13. Produit de programme informatique (124) comprenant un code de programme informatique pour effectuer, lorsqu'elles sont exécutées sur un calculateur (121) d'un véhicule aérien sans pilote (100), les étapes consistant à :
- agencer le véhicule aérien afin de décoller du sol (G) et monter ;
déduire au moins une première valeur d'altitude (10a-15a) d'un dispositif de stéréovision à détection d'altitude (122) du véhicule aérien sans pilote et obtenir au moins une deuxième valeur d'altitude (10b-15b) d'un autre dispositif (123) du véhicule aérien sans pilote lors de l'ascension (1) du véhicule aérien sans pilote ;
enregistrer la au moins une première valeur d'altitude déduite et la au moins une deuxième valeur d'altitude correspondante obtenue en tant que données d'étalonnage ;
déduire une première valeur d'altitude supplémentaire à partir du dispositif de stéréovision tandis que le véhicule aérien sans pilote parcourt un itinéraire ; et
ajuster la première valeur d'altitude supplémentaire déduite sur la base des données d'étalonnage enregistrées sans avoir à obtenir de nouvelles informations de l'autre dispositif après l'ascension.
14. Support de mémorisation lisible par ordinateur comprenant le produit de programme informatique selon

la revendication 13.

15. Signal électrique matérialisé sur une onde porteuse et propagé sur un support électrique, le signal électrique comprenant le produit de programme informatique selon la revendication 13. 5

16. Système de véhicule aérien sans pilote, comprenant : 10

un véhicule aérien sans pilote (100) comprenant un appareil de stéréovision détecteur d'altitude (122) et un autre dispositif (123); et une unité de commande (121) configurée pour : 15

- déduire au moins une première valeur d'altitude (10a-15a) du dispositif de stéréovision et obtenir au moins une seconde valeur d'altitude correspondante (10b-15b) de l'autre dispositif lors d'une ascension (1) du véhicule aérien sans pilote après décollage du sol (G) ; 20

- enregistrer la au moins une première valeur d'altitude déduite et la au moins une deuxième valeur d'altitude correspondante obtenue comme données d'étalonnage, dans lesquelles la au moins une deuxième valeur d'altitude correspondante obtenue est considérée comme une valeur vraie ; 25

- déduire une première valeur d'altitude supplémentaire à partir du dispositif de stéréovision pendant que le véhicule aérien sans pilote suit un itinéraire ; et 30

- ajuster la première valeur d'altitude supplémentaire déduite en fonction des données d'étalonnage enregistrées sans avoir à obtenir de nouvelles informations de l'autre appareil après l'ascension. 35

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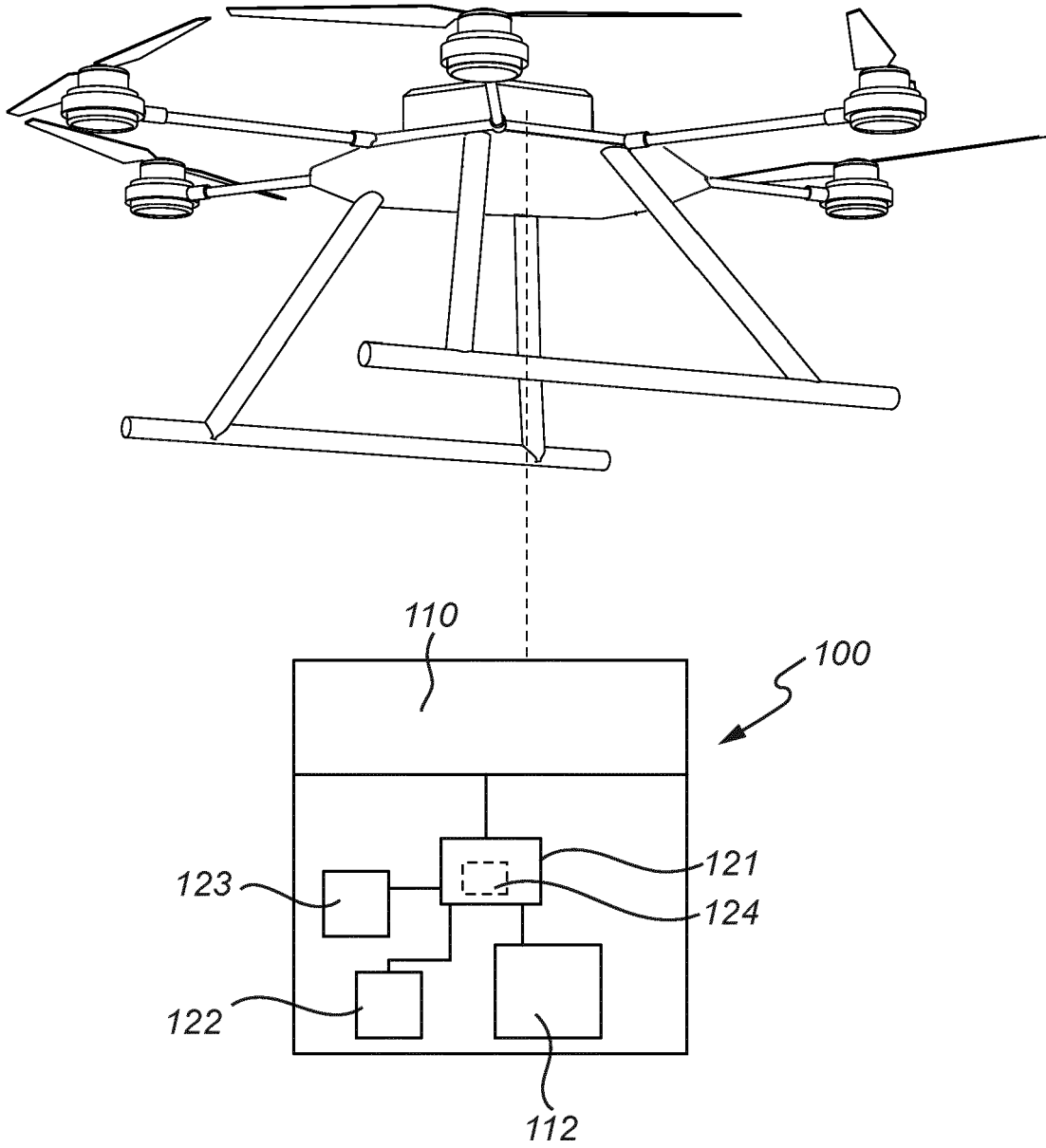


Fig. 1

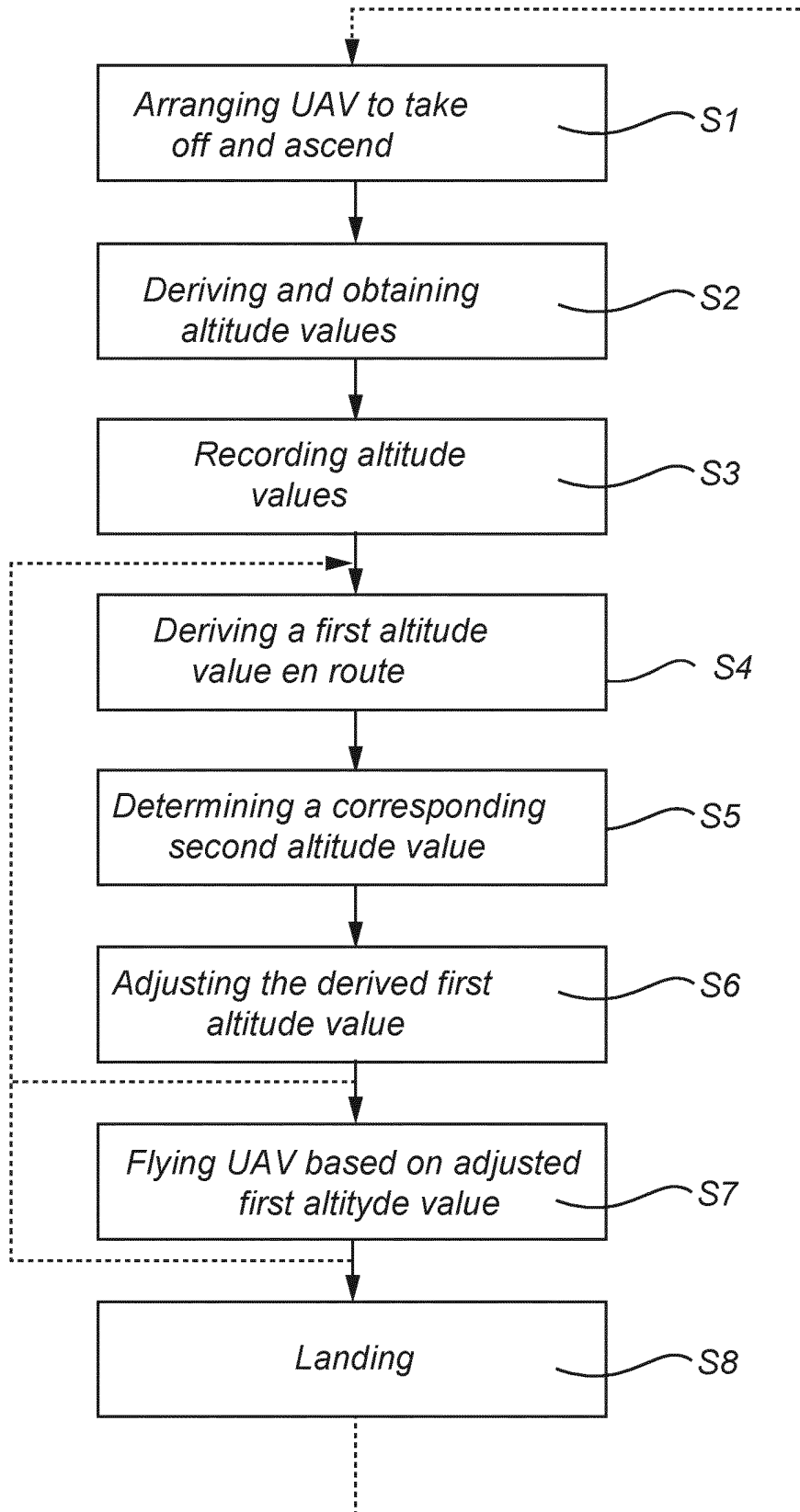


Fig. 2

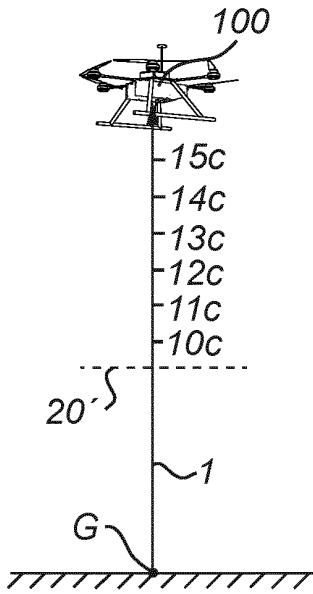


Fig. 3a

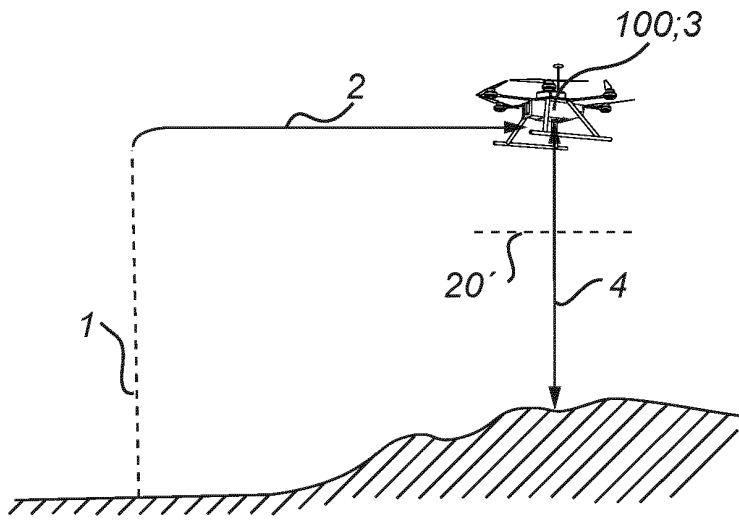


Fig. 3b

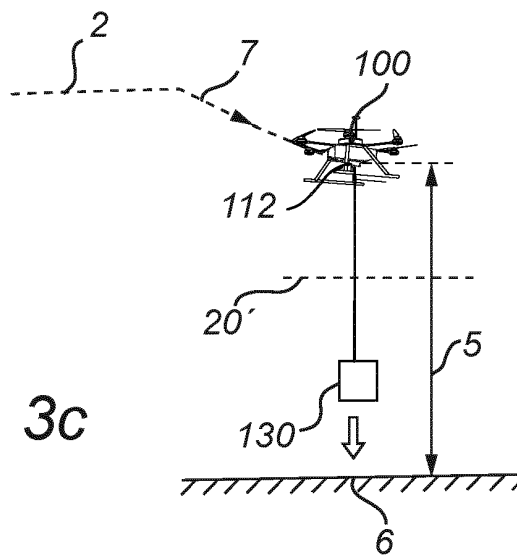


Fig. 3c

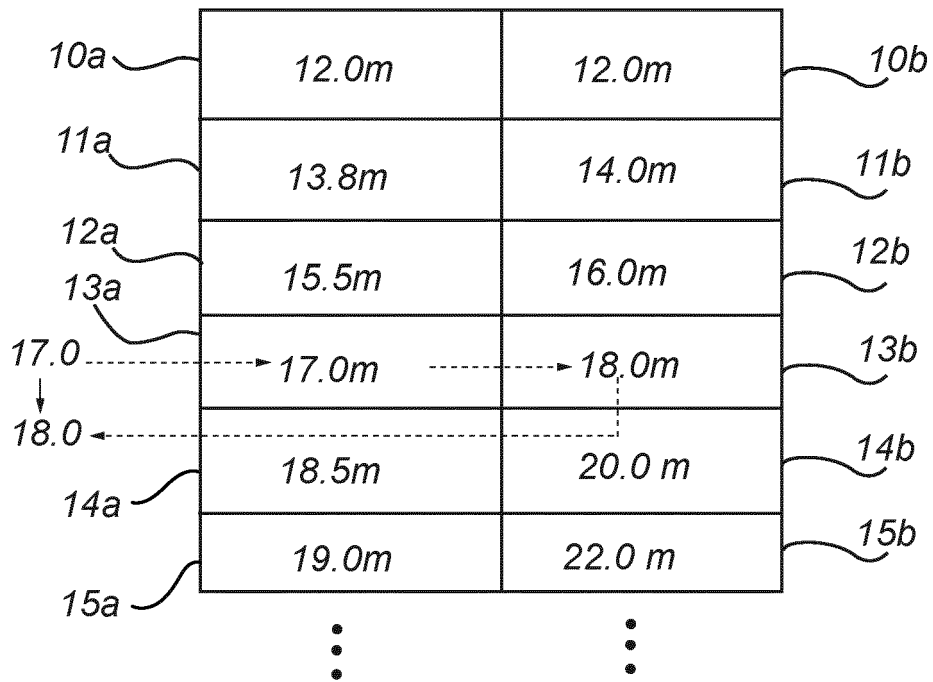


Fig. 4a

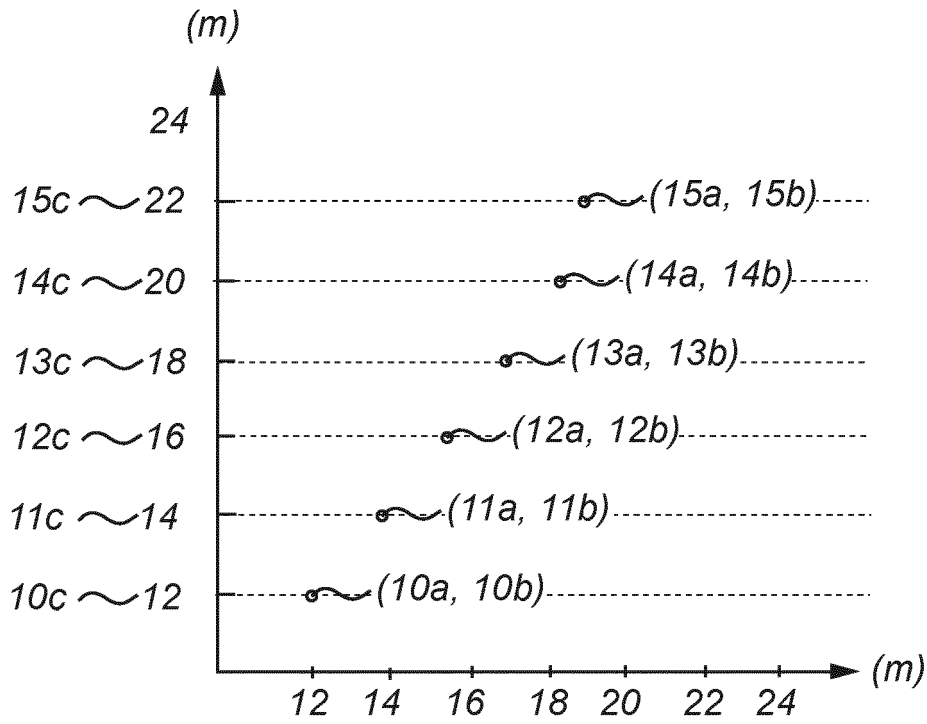


Fig. 4b

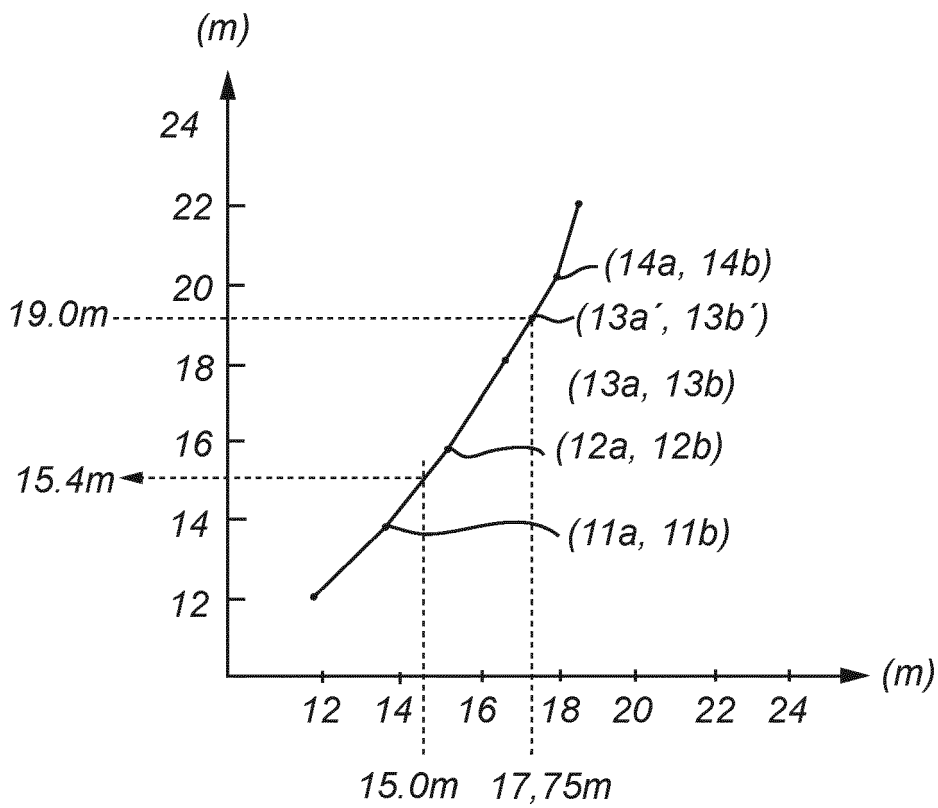


Fig. 4c

REFERENCES CITED IN THE DESCRIPTION

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